

Sunday, September 2, 2012

Did God Incite Violence and Killing in the Old Testament? (2)

In the previous article, we talked about God, the lover of mankind, the compassionate who is unchanging. He is also Just and Holy in the same time. In this article, we will resume our topic:

5 - God is Holy and does not tolerate sin and He will never reconcile with evil or uncleanness. Therefore, He will never enter into a relationship with evil people and always commanded His people not to mix with the wicked. He also commanded His people to eradicate evil and uncleanness everywhere they go, so that they would not be contaminated by this uncleanness. We can see that in his words to Moses, Joshua and the people of Israel numerous times. For instance, we can see in the book of Exodus: *"I will send My fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come... I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me. For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you"* (Exodus 23: 27-33). God was implanting the concept of purity and holiness in His people by getting rid of sin and all that is related to it, and everything that reminds them with it. Notice that the level of faith of the people in the Old Testament was rudimentary, so God had to level with them on a materialistic front in punishment and reward. Therefore, removing sin had to be achieved by removing all forms and types of sin. In the New Testament, however, man has been elevated by the grace of the Holy Spirit and God started to deal with us on a spiritual level in punishment and reward.

Therefore, God's interactions involve sanctification and purification on the one hand and fulfilling justice on the other.

6 - When we look at the commandments of God to the people of Israel in the Old Testament, we find that they were filled with compassion for the poor, the stranger, and the sojourner, and filled with justice even towards the enemies and those who harbor hatred in their hearts.

Let us see some examples:

- + *"You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him"* (Exodus 22: 21).
- + *"you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt."* (Exodus 23: 9).
- + *"If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again"* (Exodus 23: 4).
- + *"If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden... you shall surely help him with it"* (Exodus 23: 5).
- + *"You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute."* (Exodus 23: 6).
- + *"The seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; And on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed"* (Exodus 23: 11-12).
- + *"When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow."* (Deuteronomy 24: 19-21).

7 - When the kingdom of Israel became stable towards the end of David's reign and throughout the reign of his son Solomon, it was a peaceful kingdom. It was neither an aggressive kingdom nor one that had imperial ambitions. During this time, we see good relationships between Solomon and the kings of neighboring countries, near or far, such as the Queen of Sheba. The kingdom of Israel continued to be a peaceful one until the lord Jesus Christ arrived. The only thing that perturbed this peace was that when they engrossed themselves idolatry, God permitted that they would be invaded by other nations. In other words, they were punished by God through neighboring nations, this also falls within the divine justice that goes over everyone.

Note: The commandment of *"eye for eye, tooth for tooth..."* in the Old Testament which is thought to have an incitement for revenge and incompatible with love, is indeed within the framework of justice, and doesn't contradict with love. This commandment is directed towards the judge who rules among the people and not to incite people to take revenge for themselves. The verse is as follows, verbatim: *"But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe"* (Exodus 21: 23-25). This commandment is to be used as a general judicial rule; it is the spirit of the law of justice and should be used throughout generations taking into account modern developments of enforcing justice.

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